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ABSTRACT

This document traces the steps take by a rural school district to design and implement a research-based staff development program to train all teachers, K-12, to be teachers of writing and to produce students who would be writers. The three-step process involved: (1) needs assessment; (2) staff development planning; and (3) evaluation. Public pressures became acute when a 1985-86 statewide basic skills competency test, which included a writing sample, revealed that more than half of the students could not write well enough to receive a passing score. Analysis of the writing sample results was the first activity in the needs assessment step. The second part of the needs assessment was to review the strategies teachers used to teach writing. The review of test data and teaching strategies indicated that teaching methods employed in the district were not effective for a majority of the students. The second step of the process involved the establishment of a staff development program designed to produce identified outcomes. The traditional "one shot" before-school inservice training was abandoned in favor of one training session before school started and four separate follow-up sessions during the school year. The final step on the program development involved an evaluation of the program's effectiveness, indicated that teacher reactions were positive and student performance improved. (JD)

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STAFF DEVELOPMENT PLANNING THAT WORKS

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Public pressures to raise the literacy rate, particularly writing literacy, challenged school leaders in one small, rural district to design a staff development program that would produce results. In this document the writers will trace the steps the district took to design and implement a research-based staff development program to train all teachers, K-12, to be teachers of writing and to produce students who would be writers. (The three step process for designing and evaluating a staff development program is outlined in the inset.)

DETERMINE THE GOALS

The public pressures became acute when the results of the 1985-86 state-wide basic skills competency test, which included a writing sample, were published. The test revealed that more than half of the students tested could not write well enough to receive a passing score. In fact, only at one grade level did more than fifty percent of the students show mastery on the writing sample. Although only students in grades three, five, seven, and nine were tested, the conclusion was that if students who were tested could not write well, students at other grade levels were probably equally unskilled in writing. This analysis of the results

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of the writing samples was the first step in assessing the needs of the writing program in the district.

The second step in the needs assessment was to review the strategies teachers used to teach writing. This inquiry revealed that language arts teachers spent a greater amount of time teaching students about language (identifying parts of speech and parts of sentences, dissecting sentences, etc.) than they did teaching process writing (pre-writing, writing, rewriting, and editing). Teachers who taught subjects other than language arts required students to write very little and spent almost no time teaching students to write.

The review of the student test data and of the teaching strategies employed by teachers in classrooms indicated clearly that teaching methods employed in the district were not effective for a majority of the students. There was a need to change the approach to teaching writing and all teachers needed to be involved in teaching writing.

Many teachers indicated that while they had attended writing seminars for inservice credit, for career development credit, or for their own enrichment, few of them were including the techniques and concepts presented in the workshops in their daily teaching strategies. The teachers felt isolated in their attempts to individually change the

way writing was taught. The inservice challenge was to provide all teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to teach process writing and to insure that they transferred their knowledge and skills to their classroom teaching so that all students would attain at least the minimum basic writing skills.

Recognizing the need for change is much easier than gaining a commitment to change. To reach the goal of having every student achieve at least minimum basic writing skills, the district needed a commitment from three audiences--the board of trustees, the administrative staff, and the teaching staff.

After reviewing the data, the board of trustees recognized that a change was in order. The board supported the effort to improve writing instruction by approving funds for consultants and by approving abbreviated student school days to allow part of the school day to be used for staff development activities. The administrative staff accepted the fact that students were not learning to write as they should. Some endorsed the need for a change; some hesitated. Although they agreed that many students were not learning to write, many teachers were reluctant to accept the idea that changing teaching strategies would solve the problem. The commitment to change came slowly.

PLAN STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Given the need to design a staff development program that would enable teachers to transfer skills and would involve the district in a common goal, the planning included two concepts found in the literature: 1) identifying the training--coaching in collaboration with presentation of theory, demonstration, and practice and feedback, (Joyce and Showers, 1980) and 2) empowering teachers to become partners in identifying staff development needs and designing programs to meet those needs (Lambert, 1989).

Joyce and Showers (1980) concluded that effective staff development training includes: a presentation of theory, a demonstration, an opportunity for practice and feedback, and coaching. When all of these training components are used in combination there is a greater probability that the results will be mastery of knowledge and skills and there will be transfer of these skills into teacher actions in the classroom.

The outcomes of training are evidenced on four levels: 1) awareness, 2) concepts and organized knowledge, 3) principles and skills, 4) application and problem solving. It is at the fourth level, after teachers have mastered the new skills, that the changes begin to occur in the classroom. The district determined that if student writing

was to improve, that teachers would have to be operating at the application and problem solving level by the end of the training. Therefore, the design of the staff development plan called for the consultants to use all the training components: presentation of theory, modeling, practice and feedback, and coaching to help teachers reach the fourth level.

Empowering teachers to become partners with the district in the design of their professional development and to become active learners in the mastery of new programs and techniques is a vision of staff development in the district. The goal is to involve teachers in directing their own learning and in designing the district inservice (Lambert, 1989).

The concept that all teachers should be teachers of writing, Writing Across the Curriculum, had not been presented in the district prior to this time. The needs assessment indicated that changes in the teaching of writing was necessary and that teachers would need new skills to implement those changes. A staff development program was designed to address those needs of the district to improve student writing skills.

In order to correlate the information presented to the teachers with the outcomes that were expected of the

students, the teachers were grouped as follows: elementary teachers K-6; English and language arts teachers 7-12; and content area teachers 7-12. This grouping allowed for differentiation of the inservice and for specific planning that met the needs of teachers. To facilitate the training three consultants were brought to the district, one for each teacher group.

The traditional pattern of completing staff development activities prior to the beginning of school had not been effective in terms of teachers transferring information and skills into action in their classrooms. Therefore, the staff development which incorporated the four components of training was scheduled throughout the school year. A full day staff development session was scheduled before school started and four one half day follow-up sessions were scheduled approximately six weeks apart throughout the school year. The follow-up sessions were planned to include part of the school day so that teachers were not required to spend their own time for professional development activities identified by the district.

The consultants presented the theory and research related to the teaching of writing, they modeled and demonstrated the use of writing and strategies to teach writing, and they included discussions of ideas that teachers could use in their classrooms. The consultants also allowed time for the

teachers to share the results of what they had tried in their classrooms.

After each training session the consultants and the superintendent reviewed the status of the program. Based on consultants' observations and teachers questions and comments expressed to the consultants, the next sessions were planned.

In addition to presenting and discussing, consultants also visited classrooms to observe teachers teaching writing. This led to both structured and open ended feedback and coaching. The consultants were not scheduled for long term coaching, but they did model coaching strategies for teachers and principals to observe.

Building principals also attended the training sessions. The principals' participation in the staff development activities was designed to provide them with an understanding of the writing process and, consequently, to enable them to support the teachers' efforts to teach writing.

Although teachers are not at this time fully empowered as partners in designing their staff development program, the district is working with teachers, administrators and board members in determining the programs needed in the schools.

The result is that administrators and teachers are identifying staff development needs and are learning to work together to establish programs for meeting those needs at their level.

Developing a budget for a new program or procedure generally meets with some resistance. However, budgeting for this innovative approach to staff development presented few problems. Inservice training for professional staff in each district in the state is mandated by public law; therefore, the district had always provided funds for inservice/staff development programs. The funds which had been allocated for traditional type inservice programs in previous years were simply applied to this new program. Only a slight increase in the line item for consultants was needed to provide for the additional days which consultants were in the district. This was a small increase compared to the results gained.

EVALUATION

As the first year of implementation neared an end, an evaluation of the program was conducted. The evaluation of the program was based on two sources--teacher response and student test data. Some teachers said the program was the best they had ever attended. They took ideas and techniques directly from the workshops into the classrooms, and the

ideas worked. Others said that they really do not like inservice programs, but this program had been worthwhile. Still others want to go back to the traditional inservice plan--complete the program before school starts and "get it out of the way." Whatever their response, it was evident that the teacher's level of concern about writing was raised as the consultants returned periodically to see what was happening in classrooms and to provide additional training. This level of concern provided an impetus for application of skills in the classroom.

A review of student test data provided a more objective evaluation of the process. In 1985-86 only at one grade level did more than fifty percent of the students completing the state-wide basic skills competency test show mastery on the writing sample. Four years later, and one year into the staff development program for writing described above, the lowest percentage of students at a grade level mastering the writing sample was 60; the highest percentage of the four grade levels tested was 91. Many factors influenced the rise in the number of students who achieved mastery of the minimum writing skills. One variable that made a difference was the district's decision to incorporate in the staff development program the four components of effective staff development which Joyce and Showers (1980) present. Teachers not only mastered knowledge of theory and skills,

but also applied the new techniques into their classroom teaching.

The staff development design served as a plan for developing and implementing the Writing Across the Curriculum program in the district. The information gathered from the evaluation of the program plus additional input from teaching staff and administration were used to plan for continuing staff development the following year.

The student test data indicated that writing instruction for students in grades K-6 had been relatively effective. Although not all students had attained mastery of minimum basic writing skills, a majority had. Based on the test data, the observation that all elements of language (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are interrelated, and teachers' interest in learning skills to better differentiate instruction, staff development for teachers of grades K-6 was a continuation of training in developmental writing. That training was designed to help teachers develop strategies to teach language as a unit instead of teaching the elements of language as separate subjects. Incorporated into the training were strategies for differentiating instruction to accommodate those students who grasp a new concept quickly and those who take additional time to learn an idea.

Minimum basic writing skills required of students in grades 7-12 are inherently more numerous and more complex than skills required for students in grades K-6. It is understandable that students at the higher levels did not reach the levels of mastery that students at the lower levels achieved after one year in the developmental writing program. Based on this information and teachers' interest in learning skills to better differentiate instruction, staff development for language arts teachers of grades 7-12 was be a continuation of training in process writing and differentiation in instruction. Staff development training for content teachers in grades 7-12 was directed to differentiating instruction.

SUMMARY

Beginning with a needs assessment of the writing program, the staff identified the results which were being produced by the existing writing program in the district, determined what the program should be producing, and identified the discrepancy between what existed and what should exist.

Using the results of the needs assessment and incorporating research-based training techniques, the district established a staff development program designed to produce the identified outcomes. The traditional "one shot" before school inservice training session was abandoned in favor of

one training session before school started and four separate follow-up sessions during the school year. While the program design was constant the program content was flexible so that it would accommodate the changing needs of the staff. Planning staff development became an on going process. The outcomes of one session became the needs assessment for the next session and the outcomes for the year's program became the basis for planning the next year's staff development.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

I. Determine the goals

- A. Needs Assessment
  - 1. Describe the current condition
  - 2. Describe the desired condition
  - 3. Identify the steps to reach the desired condition
- B. Establish Commitment
  - 1. Identify the different audiences
  - 2. Involve the various audiences in planning
  - 3. Gain Support from the various audiences

II. Staff Development Planning

- A. Describe the outcomes of training
- B. Select the training components
- C. Develop the inservice plan
- D. Schedule the Staff development
- E. Identify the consultants and coaches
- F. Budget the resources

III. Evaluation

- A. Teachers' responses
- B. Student results
- C. Inservice outcomes

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